

COMBINING SENTENCES: AVOIDING FRAGMENTS

Some connectives make two sentences mesh in such a way that the second can no longer stand as a separate unit. When two sentences combine to become subsentences in a new larger sentence, we call them **clauses**. A dependent clause is like a two-wheel trailer. It needs to be attached to a main clause for support.

A. **Subordinators** (subordinating conjunctions) turn a sentence into a dependent clause. They are words *like if, when, where, because, unless, before, after, while, until, although*. (Some of these words have other uses.) Punctuate dependent clauses as follow:

- *If, when, where, unless, before, after*, and similar subordinators introduce *conditions* that can make all the difference to the overall meaning of the statement. Use *no* punctuation between two clauses.

No comma: We will reach Oregon next week *if the oxen hold out*.

The whole group is doomed *unless we find water*.

Fear stalked the camp *after the sun went down*.

- *Though, although, and whereas* line two contrasting statements that would each be true even if stated separately. Use a comma.

Comma: The natives loved contests and games, whereas the Puritans considered many forms of recreation sinful.

The women of the tribe did most of the work, *although the men helped make pottery*.

- When the dependent clause comes *first*, use the *comma* regardless of which subordinator is used.

Comma: *If all goes well*, we will reach Oregon next week.

Before you enter the mosque, take off your shoes.

When a period separates the dependent clause from the main clause, a sentence fragment results.

Fragment: My uncle will leave me his money. Unless he disinherits me.

Revised: My uncle will leave me his money, unless he disinherits me.

2. **Relative pronouns** take the place of a noun in the second sentence. They then link the resulting relative clause to the main clause. Relative pronouns are *who (whose, whom), which, and that*. (All these words also have other uses.) Punctuate relative clauses as follows:

- Use *no* punctuation if the relative clause answers the question “Which one?” or “What kind?” Such a clause is **restrictive**—it narrows our choice or singles out: the person *who called*; athletes *who fail*; the team *that won*.

Two Statements: The settlers distrusted Indians. *The Indians had turned Christian.*

Relative Clause: The settlers distrusted Indians *who had turned Christian.*

Two Statements: The plane crashed. *He had rented the plane.*

Relative Clause: The plane *that he had rented* crashed.

- Use a comma if the relative clause is **nonrestrictive**—if it is not used to help us narrow our choice or to identify one among several: Mayor Graves, *who was on vacation*; the Empire State building, *which was then the tallest structure*. Use *two* commas if such a nonrestrictive clause interrupts the main clause: Pigeons, *which were everywhere*, dirtied the buildings.

Two Statements: Sailors sold firearms to the Indians. *The Indians used them well.*

Relative Clause: Sailors sold firearms to the Indians, *who used them well.*

Two Statements: Coffee was once a luxury. *Coffee is now a household staple.*

Relative Clause: Coffee, *which is now a household staple*, was once a luxury.

When a period separates the relative clause from the main clause, a sentence fragment results:

Fragment: George likes Western music. Which bores his friends.

Revised: George likes Western music, which bores his friends.

At the right at the end of each passage, put the following: **No** (for “no punctuation”); **C** (for comma, or commas); or **P** (for period—use a period only if both parts of the passage are complete sentences not introduced by a subordinator or a relative pronoun).

1. Before you can become a pilot ____ you must pass a number of tests. _____
2. Police officers are helpless ____ if the authorities don’t back them up. _____
3. My parents overemphasized good grades ____ which I never attained. _____
4. The police officer ____ who shot the fleeing suspect ____ was acquitted. _____
5. Helen kept her past life a secret ____ people like here do not believe in true confessions. _____

6. If a different blond-haired man harasses you every day for a week ____ you will be wary of all blond-haired people by the eighth day. _____
7. Parents run into trouble ____ when they inflict their own ideas on their children. _____
8. The park had varied wildlife ____ rattlesnakes lived there. _____
9. Audiences loved the play ____ although every critic in town had panned it. _____
10. The passengers panicked ____ after the lights went out. _____
11. He always had a kind word for his uncle Ed ____ who had helped him after the war. _____
12. A diesel engine doesn't have spark plugs ____ whereas ordinary engines do. _____
13. The hills are dry as dust ____ until the rains start. _____
14. The priest befriended criminals ____ who were ready for a new life. _____
15. The statue ____ that tourists see in the yard ____ is a replica. _____